time-tested policy of pursuing on independent line on all international issues?

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has announced an increase in the package of financial assistance to combat HIV/AIDS from $ 100 million to $ 200 million at their India AIDS Initiative (Avahan) Programme Board meeting in New Delhi on October 13,2003.This has been done to strengthen the different strategies like focus on prevention among high-risk groups and along national highways particularly in six high prevalence States namely Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Manipur, Nagaland & Tamil Nadu, under the India AIDS Initiative Programme on the Foundation.

(c) Government of India has not so far received any funds from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. We are not aware of any conditionalities other than the need for accelerated achievement and independent monitoring by an external agency. This is the normal precaution in the case of any/every grant utilized.

(d) Does not arise.

Base hospitals in Uttaranchal

1297. SHRI HARISH RAWAT: Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) the districts in Uttaranchal where base hospitals with advance medicine facilities have not been set up so far;

(b) whether Government are providing financial assistance for offering basic medical facilities to the people living in large parts of the state; and

(c) if so, by when the base hospitals would be set up in the said districts?

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ): (a) and (c) Health being a State subject, it is the responsibility of the State Government to provide medical facilities to the people living in the state keeping in view their priorities and availability of resources. However, on the basis of socio-economic status, regional

imbalances both inprovision of speciality health care services as well as in specialized medical education across the country, the Government has decided in principle to set up super speciality hospitals on the pattern of All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi under "Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana" in six States, which includes State of Uttaranchal.

Blindness among children

†1298. SHRI ABU ASIM AZMI: Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether in Delhi alone eyes of 58 per cent school going children have got damaged;

(b) whether Government have conducted any inquiry in this regard so that the defects in the eyes at childhood could be cured throughout the country;

(c) if so, the details thereof;

(d) whether Government have made proper arrangements for diagnosis and treatment of the cause of blindness; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRI A. RAJA): (a) No Sir, A Survey conducted in 2001 revealed that only 7.4% children in 5 to 15 year age group had visual impairment. The prevalence of blindness in this age group was 0.1%.

(b) and (c) Common cause of visual impairment among school children are refractive errors which account for 70% of the cases. Other causes of Visual Impairment are Alblyopia, Corneal Opacity and Retinal Disorders.

(d) and (e) Yes, Sir. Government Hospitals and NGOs have been supported under National Programme for Control of Blindness for diagnosis and treatment of main causes of blindness. Eye Camps are also arranged in the rural areas for screening of the population. Screening of school children is also conducted to detect and treat children with visual problems.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.